

3/6/65 WFOST

Pro-Peking Reds Big Winners In Kerala but Lack a Majority

By Selig S. Harrison
Washington Post Foreign Service

TRIVANDRUM, India, March

5 — Pro-Peking Communists and their allies emerged as the strongest single force among Kerala's divided political factions here today in an embarrassing setback for Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri.

Election results from 131 out of 133 constituencies in this key South Indian state showed the dominant Chinese-oriented wing of the Kerala communist Party leading with 41 seats. Another seven independents elected with Communist support and 11 Socialist legislators are regarded as potential allies of the Communists in the formation of a coalition regime.

Congress Party Lags

But it appeared possible that no one party would command the 68-vote majority in the state legislature needed to forge a coalition.

This would mean the continuation of the central government presidential rule in force here for the past five months since a split among Kerala leaders of Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri's governing Congress Party.

The Congress Party won only 34 seats today despite an electioneve appeal by Shastri warning Kerala voters against supporting pro-Peking Communist candidates.

29 Red Victors in Jail

Shastri faces an awkward dilemma in the fact that 29 out of the Communist victors were elected while imprisoned on charges of pro-Chinese sympathies.

What the central government must now decide is whether to release the Communist prisoners who have won in the elections and risk the possibility of a Communist-led coalition government or continue to brand

them as

One of the most striking aspects of the election results was the virtual eclipse of the pro-Moscow Communist candidates, with only two seats. There were some signs that this resulted in part from a quiet alliance between the Russophile Communists and the Congress Party in as many as ten of the constituencies where the Congress won.

Observers pointed out that well-established Communist leaders identified with the pro-

Moscow party wing polled conspicuously low votes in traditional Communist strongholds such as Trivandrum, Palghat and Alleppey districts, and that Congress candidates in these areas showed curiously strong support.

The third strongest bloc in the new lineup of Kerala parties is a group of Congress dissidents known as the Kerala Congress, composed primarily of Christian factions and leaders of the high-caste Hindu Nairs.

With 25 seats, the Kerala Congress holds a balance of power position in the new legislature. It could conceivably form a government with the support of the Socialists and the five-member Moslem league bloc.

Such a grouping might enjoy the tacit support of the Congress party. Or it might seek to set up a government with the benevolent neutrality of the pro-Peking Communists.

Another possibility among the many political permutations under consideration here tonight is that the Kerala Con-

gress and the pro-Shastri Congress will reunite under the leadership of the dissidents. The bête noir of the Kerala Congress leaders, former Congress Chief Minister R. R. Sankar, was defeated in the elections. Sankar is a leader of the low-caste Ezhavas and has been charged with caste favoritism by the Christians and high-caste Nairs.

The division of Christian votes between the Congress and the Kerala Congress appeared to be a factor helping the pro-Peking Communists.

Church Silent

In contrast to past elections, when the all-Kerala Catholic Bishops Conference backed the Congress against the Communists, the Church refrained from a direct choice between the two Congress groups in many constituencies.

Kerala claims the highest population density in the Indian subcontinent and its highest literacy rate. An estimated 4 million out of its population of 17 million belong

to Catholic and other Christian groups. But it is also the only area of its size in the world where Communists have won power through parliamentary means.

A Communist cabinet ruled here from April, 1957 through July, 1959. The central government stepped in at that point with presidential rule after a Christian-Nair agitation against the Communist regime.